

# critical digest

VOL. III No. 37

May 21, 1951

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

## New York Openings This Week

Idiot's Delight-City Center, 5/23/51. Lee Tracy and Ruth Chatterton star in New York City Theatre Company revival of Robert E. Sherwood Pulitzer Prize play. Directed by George Schaefer. Stefan Schnabel, Emmett Rogers and Louis Borell are featured.

## Digests of Current Reviews-more on back page

Flahooley-Broadhurst, 5/14/51. Split decision on play, people and puppets involved in Cheryl Crawford production of Harburg-Saidy "magical musical". News, Mirror, Compass, Journal American, Eagle, Newark News and Women's Wear critics enjoyed the many elements of the complicated musical production. Though Coleman, Mirror, would have none of the "message" which attacks our system of economics at a critical time. Star billing went to the Baird Marionettes, with added praise for Yma Sumac, Ernest Truex, Edith Atwater, Irwin Corey. Atkinson, Times, feared involved plot and production made it the most humorless, verbose and complicated musical of season. Guernsey, Herald Tribune, termed it a standard warm weather Broadway musical that was weak in the laughter and continuity departments. Rice, Post, admitted that he, along with most of the cast, got completely lost in the plot. Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, among others, felt the puppets stole the show. Unusual singing talents of Yma Sumac were generally praised, though several were stumped by her. Dash, Women's Wear, recommended musical for all who like originality, fancifulness and imagination.

Getting Married-ANTA Playhouse, 5/13/51. ANTA's final subscription play of season, produced by Ewings, was panned by seven daily critics as dated and talky; News, Compass, Journal American, and WT&S critics praised production as well done, finely acted and certainly worth while. Shanley, Times, blamed script, while Guernsey, Herald Tribune, blamed poor production. Peggy Wood and John Buckmaster shared top compliments in large all star cast. Director Peter Frye did a magnificent job, or a very poor one, depending upon which review you read. Coleman, Mirror, suggested ANTA appoint a full time professional producer to handle next year's series. Sheaffer, Eagle, is positive ANTA could have found a more interesting Shaw script on the shelves. While Chapman, News, considered it one of the old boy's glibbest comedies.

## Editorial Pros & Cons

The League of New York Theatres has sent a letter to its members aiming to prevent conflicting opening dates in the future. For producers who do not comply with League orders "imposing penalties" are threatened. Payment of expenses incurred by management forced to defer its opening is planned. Authority and power for enforcing such a step is questionable but at least it is a move in the right direction. Not only must a way be found to enforce the League rulings, but the League must find a way to spread the 60 to 80 openings more evenly throughout the year. This would benefit everyone concerned.

## News & Notes

Garland, Journal American, to speak at Seven Arts Festival at Lake Tarleton Hotel...Atkinson, Times, and Morehouse, WT&S, on Clarence Derwent Award Committee...Herald Tribune and Cornelia Otis Skinner deny rumor she will be appointed critic, reports Variety..."Who is your Favorite Critic" to be asked in survey at Henry Miller Theatre...Bron, Variety, reviewed The Little Blue Light, not Hobe...Theatre Information Bulletin starts eighth year of publication...Billboard guested two dozen stage managers at start of Donaldson award voting.

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' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '  
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|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. NY Times             | 11. Women's Wear Daily  | 21. Freeman              |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune    | 12. Wall Street Journal | 22. Commonweal           |
| 3. NY News              | 13. Journal of Commerce | 23. Cue                  |
| 4. NY Mirror            | 14. George Jean Nathan  | 24. Chr. Science Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass           | 15. Ward Morehouse      | 25. Sat. Review Lit.     |
| 6. NY Post              | 16. Morning Telegraph   | 26. Newsweek             |
| 7. NY Journal American  | 17. Variety             | 27. Time                 |
| 8. World Telegram & Sun | 18. Billboard           | 28. Nation               |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle       | 19. Theatre Arts        | 29. New Republic         |
| 10. Newark News         | 20. New Leader          | 30. New Yorker           |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "Pro".

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| AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50.         | - Cont: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29.<br>None: 16-21-23-28.                 |
| THE AUTUMN GARDEN-3/7/51.         | - Cont: 1-4-5-6-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-20-24.<br>None: 19-21-25-29. So-So: 22.             |
| BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE-11/14/50.   | - Cont: 2-6-15-17-19-20-22.  |
| CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50.           | - Cont: 18-19-28-29. So-So: 3. None: 16-21.  |
| THE COUNTRY GIRL-11/10/50.        | - Cont: 4-8-14-27-28-30. None: 21.   |
| DARKNESS AT NOON-1/13/51.         | - Cont: 1-14-17-19-22-24-26-29.<br>None: 25-28. So-So: 5-12-13-23.                       |
| FLAHOOLEY-5/14/51.                | - Cont: 1-2-6-8. None: 12-13-14-15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30.         |
| GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-12/8/50. | - Cont: 6-28. None: 21-25. So-So: 14-18-22-23-27.  |
| GRAMERCY GHOST-4/23/51.           | - Cont: 1-2-4-5-6-10-11-17-26-27-30.<br>None: 12-13-14-15-16-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-28-29. |
| GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50.          | - Cont: 28.  |
| THE HAPPY TIME-1/24/50.           | - Cont: 5-6-15-19-26-27-28-30. None: 10-21.  |
| THE KING AND I-3/29/51.           | - Cont: 28. None: 19-20-21.  |
| KISS ME KATE-12/31/48.            | - Cont: 29. None: 21-28.   |
| MAKE A WISH-4/18/51.              | - Cont: 1-5-6-12-14-23-24-27-28-29-30.<br>None: 15-19-20-21-25.                          |
| THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51.          | - Cont: 14-19. None: 21-25-28-29.  |
| THE ROSE TATTOO-2/3/51.           | - Cont: 4-6-7-14-19-21-24-25-27. None: 12-20-22.   |
| SEASON IN THE SUN-9/28/50.        | - Cont: 9-11-20-24-28.<br>None: 7-13-15-16-21. So-So: 10.                                |
| SOUTH PACIFIC-4/8/49.             | - Cont: 27. So-So: 23. None: 5-9-10-12-14-20-21-28.<br>None: 5-9-10-12-14-20-21-28-29.   |
| STALAG 17-5/8/51                  | - Cont: 4. So-So: 3. None: 12-13-14-15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30.     |
| A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN-4/19/51  | - Cont: 2-7-14-18-25-27-28. None: 13-15-19-20-21.  |
| TWENTIETH CENTURY-12/24/50.       | - Cont: 5-24-26. None: 4-12-14-15-16-21-25.  |

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' Green Room Department '  
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PULITZER AFTERTHOUGHTS...Perhaps withholding of Pulitzer Prize in drama this year was for good of theatre, suggests Chapman, News. By waiting until "original play on American life" is presented, the board may encourage such plays in place of adaptations...Winchell thinks Guys and Dolls should have won, while Saturday Review believes Billy Budd deserved it...Variety understands latter was recommended by drama panel, but overruled by supervisory board.

FIRST TEN BEST...Rushing the season, Watts, Post, filed his selection of ten best plays. His list of plays picked includes: Billy Budd, The Lady's Not For Burning, Darkness At Noon, The Country Girl, Ring Round the Moon, The Autumn Garden, Second Threshold, The Moon Is Blue and Stalag 17.

COLUMN TIPS...Margaret Truman has offers to appear in Candida, The Mikado and Seventh Heaven, hears Lyons...Why don't Broadway theatres launch shows with the national anthem, queries Winchell.

LONDON SUM UP...The New York theatre has the plays and the London theatre has the actors, is how Morehouse, WT&S, digests his findings of a two week theatre-going visit to England.

NOBODY ASKED CANNON...Pet theatrical peevishnesses of Cannon, Post, include: Never knowing a theatrical ticket agency clerk who didn't think he was witty eccentric. Also, people who are late for the theatre do the most talking while the play is on.

TICKET BROKERS HAILED...Legitimate ticket brokers are the theatre's best salesmen locally and nationally, explains Coleman, Mirror. If they were good enough for the theatre when it was great, why not give them a chance to help make it great again. Brokers financed many shows in the days when 80 plays would be running at one time.

SUGGESTED AWARD...Theatre Ushers, Inc. should give a prize to Politest Member of First Night Audience, recommends Gabriel, Cue. Such a move might kill off the hundreds of silly awards that are made every spring. We often come close to killing our theatre with kindness.

WILLIAMS ON CRITICS...Critics should meet the playwright half way, Tennessee Williams wrote to Lerner, Post, thanking him for his "Number One Boy" piece. The playwright thinks there are few playwrights because there aren't many willing to stand up against the grind. Atkinson, Times, is consistently sympathetic to what he recognizes as something better than hack work, but George Jean Nathan seems to want to blast the playwright out of the ground at the first little sign of intransigence. The trouble with such critics is that they write so excruciatingly well, complains Williams.

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' Theatre News Round Up '  
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Damon Runyon Awards in "Living Arts" will be made annually on December 10, Bernard Baruch will head the board...Wilson, Post, m.c. on WABD-TV "Stage Entrance"... Roger Rice signed to replace Ray Middleton in South Pacific, Claude Dauphin to replace Rex Harrison in Bell, Book and Candle, Robert Preston to replace Jose Ferrer in Twentieth Century... "Photoplay" to present two year scholarship yearly to Pasadena Playhouse...Dodge has cancelled ABC-TV "Showtime, USA", but ANTA backed TV show has other sponsors interested...Council of Living Theatre dinner honoring 1000th performance of Tom Hoier in Kiss Me Kate cancelled because 75 year old actor fell ill... Stark Young spoke on Eleanor Duse at ANTA dividend matinee.



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' Variety's Poll of NY Critics '  
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Claude Rains, Maureen Stapleton, Uta Hagen, Shirley Booth, and Yul Brynner won Variety's annual poll of drama critics for best performances of season. Eli Wallach and Maureen Stapleton were chosen most promising, while George S. Kaufman won votes as best director. Billy Budd playwrights were chosen most promising writers, and Rodgers & Hammerstein chosen the outstanding producers Jo Mielzner was picked best scene designer, and Frank Loesser received most of the votes as best song writer.

Many interesting sidelights in critics' comments on season were included with the results. Most were happy that Variety had ended its controversial "Critics Box Score", which Atkinson, Times, tabbed "a mugg's hassle". Times critic considered season "continuously interesting." Guernsey, Herald Tribune, called it "fair", while George Jean Nathan found it "dismal". Morehouse, WT&S, doesn't think there was a really fine dramatic play all season. Chapman, News, complained that there wasn't enough brilliant and stimulating pieces of theatre. Diverse views recorded by critics on ANTA series. Though Times and WT&S critics okayed it, Nathan said "no", Herald Tribune men said "no comment," while Pollock, Compass, and Morehouse suggested careful choice of fewer plays. Coleman, Mirror, admitted he felt he was gypped. Most critics thought season belonged to actors, as against authors and directors.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '  
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Stalag 17-48th St. Theatre, 5/7/51. Five weekly reviewers okayed Bevan-Trzcinski "comedy melodrama" as sock entertainment, while Gibbs, New Yorker, billed it as something designed primarily for delayed adolescents. Though he found most of humor dull and embarrassing, he admitted the audience felt otherwise. This included the ladies, bless their dirty little minds. Variety, Billboard, Time, Newsweek and Cue critics praised comedy elements, good performances, and swift paced direction of producer Jose Ferrer above the serious elements of a stock melodrama. Time critic was amazed that script never taints its humor with anything the least bit real.

Dream Girl-City Center, 5/9/51. Gabriel, Cue, and Bron, Variety, credited star Judy Holliday with saving what otherwise might have been a weak, dated revival of the Elmer Rice romantic comedy. Former critic feared that even so, the production was more of a wide flapping farce, but thanks to star's efforts it was only a junior miss. Francis, Billboard, found the show still contained considerable fun, but he was very disappointed with Miss Holliday. Her obvious attempt to steer away from her earlier characterization made her performance fairly monotonous. New York City Theatre company production, staged by Morton da Costa, may be moved to a downtown Broadway theatre, if the star's Hollywood commitments don't interfere.

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' Legit Stuff '  
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Robert Breen resigned as executive secretary of ANTA, Colonel C. Lawton Campbell, chairman of the board, took over his duties...Actor's Fund of America 69th annual meeting was held this week...President Truman endorsed idea of privately financed 50 million national theatre and sports center for Washington...City Center deficit over 72,000..."Theatre World" awards to "most promising personalities of the Broadway stage" given to Pat Crowley, Cloris Leachman, Isabel Bigley, Barbara Ashley, Maureen Stapleton, Marcia Van Dyke, Russell Nye, Martin Brooks, Richard Burton, Walter J. Palance, Eli Wallach, James Daly and William Smithers...Frederic March auditioned over 250 for Barter Theatre...Eugene O'Neill left Doctor's Hospital for reunion with wife in Boston...Gibbs, New Yorker, has just inherited \$300,000 from an aunt says Kilgallen.

